

Starting an Exchange Step-By-Step

Guide by Candace Black

Setting up your first exchange program is a 2-year process, with travel to France in year 2. The following is a basic timeline for planning your exchange program:

1. Your school's commitment: even though the exchange is set up to be self-funding, your district will incur some costs as a result. It is important to discuss these potential costs with your principal so that as you develop a budget, you know what financial support you can count on from the district. These costs may include:
 - a. the substitute teacher coverage for yourself and any accompanying chaperones for the trip to France (you will need between 2 and 5 days off from school in addition to February or April break, depending on when you travel) as well as any field trips during school while you are hosting the French (such as to Niagara Falls or City of Rochester sites);
 - b. the district buses used to transport your French and American students on field trip while you are hosting the French;
 - c. a small gift from the school to each exchange student (such as a t-shirt with the school's logo on it)
 - d. school lunch vouchers for the French students while they are in the U.S. (contact your food service director to find out if he/she would be willing to provide this)
 - e. refreshments for a welcome reception (cookies & punch) for the French students, their American hosts and others
2. What are the basic elements of the exchange? You will have to layout the basic structure of the exchange to propose it to your district before you can have definitive information. This will include:
 - a. the dates of proposed travel (you will most likely need to miss several days of school to go to France even given that you will travel over a school vacation and these days need to be approved); because missed instructional time should be minimized and because your goal is to have an ACADEMIC exchange program, the best times of year to travel are February break and April break (with April being the obvious preference due to the better weather in France);
 - b. the dates of proposed hosting (this can take place over February or April break or at other times during the year such as October); some schools like to travel first in one year and then host the following, which allows for maximum planning time; other schools prefer to host in October and then travel in April of the same school year and then take the whole next year off = a bi-annual exchange program.
 - c. What other teachers could you enlist to help you in the planning and execution of the exchange? Because this is an academic exchange (not a tour program) in which there is a significant amount of family time away from the group, the best chaperones are those who have travelled/lived abroad and who have a basic command of French.
 - d. How and from where will you recruit students? It is recommended that you minimally start recruiting students in the early spring of the year PRIOR to travelling. The cost of the program, which is about ½ of what a tour program costs, is still significant and it is important to give your students enough time to

raise the money and for you to plan the exchange. If possible, it is a good idea to be selective in recruiting students, although in the first year, sometimes it is necessary to take all students that apply as the exchange needs to gain momentum over the years. Before accepting students officially, review the disciplinary or “good standing” policy of your district. If a student is suspended in the months prior to the exchange, what action will the school take? Will he/she be refused participation in the exchange without a refund? Have a very specific conversation with your principal about this and then follow-up with an email to him/her that sums up your conversation. This way you will have a date/time-stamped “memo of understanding” that you can refer to in the future should a sticky situation present itself.

- e. What is the maximum number of students you are willing to take? 20 is a workable number, both financially and logistically. Anything over 30 students is not recommended for a new exchange and requires a team (not a single teacher) of planners.
 - f. Are you willing to organize fundraisers or do you have a parent booster club that would do this for you?
3. Once you have been given the initial go-ahead from your principal, contact the Rennes-Rochester Sister Cities Committee to enlist their support. Their primary function will be to match you up with a school in France that is looking for a partner and to provide you with access to individuals experienced in running exchange programs who can guide you through your first few years.
 4. The Rennes-Rochester Sister Cities Committee is in contact with its counterpart in France. The committees on each side of the ocean will contact the high schools being matched up. Once this happens, it is your turn to make direct contact with your French counterpart in Rennes (an English teacher or team of teachers) to get to know each other and determine how the exchange will be organized. You will firm up the initial elements of the exchange discussed above: when will you host? When will you travel to France? How many students will participate on each side? What are the big events/visits that will take place during each trip (for instance, when in France, it is typical for the Americans to be taken to Mt. Saint Michel and the American Cemetery in Normandy; by the same token, when in the US, it is typical for the French to be taken to Niagara Falls, Canada). It is also a good idea to confirm the general practice that each group pays for its own transportation to and from their destination as well as any excursion to Paris/NYC, however, when in Rennes, it is expected that all costs are paid for by the French (meals, excursions to local area sites, entrance fees, etc...). By the same token, when in Rochester, it is expected that all costs are paid for by the Americans. Email is a great way to make first contact, however, a better idea is to set up a monthly or bi-monthly Skype session where you can video chat with your French counterpart.
 5. Now that you have a basic structure for your exchange (dates, etc...), you will need to enlist FORMAL support from your district and board of education by filling out a “Field Trip Approval” form. This form will outline the basics of the exchange including costs. It is essential that you get this form approval PRIOR to recruiting students.
 6. You will have to collect money from students to pay for this trip. Your school may have a policy on handling deposits for trips – you will need to find out what this policy is.
 - a. Some schools require that all funds be deposited with the school’s secretary into a club account (then when you need to pay for things such as airline tickets, you request the secretary cut a check directly from the school account).
 - b. Other schools prefer not to get involved in the finances. If this is the case, the easiest thing to do is to file a “Doing Business As” or “DBA” form with the county clerk’s office for \$35, creating a “business name” such as (School/town’s name) French Booster. This will allow you to get a bank account under

the business name so that none of the exchange's funds are mixed with your personal funds.

- c. You will also need to decide if you will have the parents pay in installments (for instance \$200 a month for 7 months) or in a lump sum prior to the purchasing of airline tickets.
7. Once district support of the exchange has formally been given, promote the exchange program by pushing in to all French classes (possibly avoiding freshman classes as these students generally do not possess the maturity to participate in an exchange.
 - a. Handout a flyer with all of the basic information about the exchange to interested students and setup a date for an after-school interest meeting.
 - b. At the student interest meeting, have students sign up so that you will have their names. Give them basics of the exchange (cost, dates, etc...) as well as an application form. This form should require a parent signature indicating the parent supports the student's participation as well as two faculty signatures attesting to the maturity of the student. The application should be handed in along with a \$100 deposit.
 - c. About two weeks later (and before the applications/deposits are due), hold a parent interest meeting at night to answer any questions parents may need answered prior to committing to the exchange. Be sure to explain that a minimum number of participants is required for the exchange to go.
 - d. Collect applications and deposits. Along with the other chaperone(s) that will accompany you to France, review the students' applications and if you have enough, select those students who are most qualified to participate.
8. You now have a working group of participants and the process in place for collecting money. If you are hosting first (which is highly recommended – allows you to get to know the French first; allows you to set up your expectations for the hosting experience; French students tend to be more mature in general and have better English skills than our students have French skills due to the French starting English instruction earlier), then you will need to organizing the hosting period.
 - a. Finalize the dates of hosting. A week to 9 days is the ideal amount of time for the French to stay in Rochester – with less time, the students don't get to know each other well enough and with more, the Americans get rather stressed at having a constant companion during their regularly busy lives. The dates of hosting will in part be determined by the flight that the French get, so be very clear in your expectations for how long they can stay.
 - b. Generate a list of possible activities with your students such as:
 - i. (no cost) School sports games – the French will love to go to a football game.
 - ii. (no/low cost) Welcome reception on the first school day the French will be here. (To reduce the cost of such an event, have each host family bring a dessert/snack or drink.)
 - iii. (no cost) Other school events (Homecoming, art shows, etc...)
 - iv. (no cost) Mayoral reception at City Hall (coordinate through Rennes-Rochester Sister Cities Committee)
 - v. (fee) Arts & Cultural Organizations such as Rochester Museum & Science Center, Eastman Museum Strong Museum, Memorial Art Gallery
 - vi. (fee) Bowling